

Purposefulness and Mindfulness for Leadership Effectiveness



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Cover Illustration: A photograph taken by me in Savar, Bangladesh in April 2016. This photograph inspires me to reflect on the concept of purpose and my purposefulness:
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Abstract

This paper explores some initial thoughts and concepts related to understanding the process that helps *leaders find their purpose and live purposefully* as a part of my doctoral inquiry. This inquiry process includes a series of interviews and conversations with a colleague of mine who is a PhD candidate, inquiring into the phenomenon of ‘Mindfulness in Organisations’, interspersed with action inspired by our interactions and reflections there on. These interactions have revealed how purposefulness and mindfulness impact leadership effectiveness in organisations.

Introduction – What is my question, why is it important to me and what is it in service of?

This paper explores some initial thoughts and concepts related to understanding the process that helps leaders discover their purpose and live a purposeful life, as a part of my doctoral inquiry relating to my inquiry question ‘*how does purposefulness help leaders be effective in organisations?*’ My on-going inquiry has led me to discover the concept of ‘mindfulness’ and the initial indications of the importance of being both purposeful and mindful to be an effective leader. My inquiry question is drawn from the intersection of three themes; purposefulness, leadership effectiveness and organisations as shown in figure1 below;

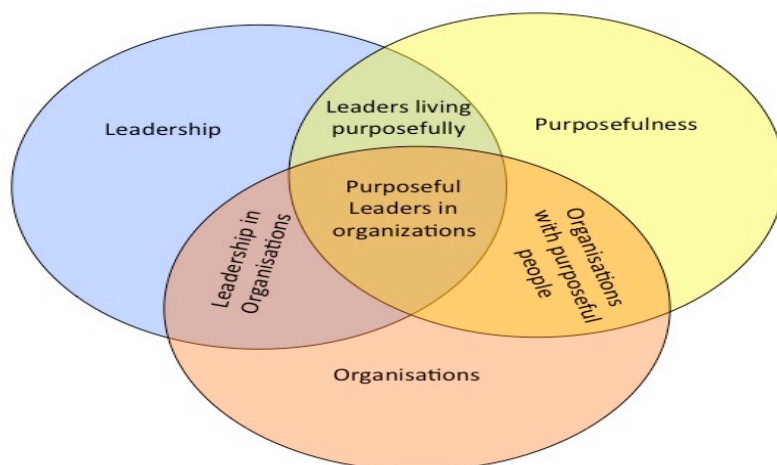


Figure 1: My inquiry question an intersection of three themes

This question is important to me because I have become happier since the time I started attempting to live more purposefully over the last 17 years. Happiness to me is a feeling of joy when I am being of value to my world. What 'value' means to me is, to contribute to making my world a better place. What 'making my world a better place' means to me is action that can help change conditions that are more conducive to peaceful living; it is the absence of stress, tension, conflict, violence, infidelity, repression etc. in my world, the part of the world I experience and not the planet as a whole.

I used the metaphor 'Lighting Candle' in my inquiry proposal to describe a person who has at least found a sense of his or her purpose, attempts to live a life that is consistent with the purpose and helps others to start finding and living a purposeful life. I am still searching for the answer to the question; is it really possible to know what our purpose is and what constitutes purposeful living. It is a constant search. Once the candle is lit (knowing the beginnings of the purpose and starting to live a purposeful life) he or she might be able to inspire others to do the same consciously or subconsciously and by design or by accident based on each person's role. The light, articulated in more prosaic terms, is the wisdom and resources to find and live a purposeful life at home and at work.

One of the methods I use in my practice of helping leaders to be more effective in their roles, is to help them discover their purpose, articulate their purpose and live life purposefully at home and at work. While I have not formally researched the impact of my work, the informal feedback I receive from these leaders, their team members and their family shows this approach is effective. The following section from one of the many written testimonials received illustrate this point.

There is a vacuum of competence and leadership in the world; people living congruently, fairly, and emphatically. Sharing gifts of love with their companies, communities, families are the only ways we can hope to be saved. We have to share and spread these gifts (Tools) in the spirit of love and service, connect the possibilities to those who are around us to unlock their potential in order to live better in the world. We have to challenge each other to model the way of life. Thanking you a lot, Mr. Ranjan and

your team, for this gift. With kind regards. (Rahman, 2012).

Therefore I feel that an inquiry in to this question could result in formulating theories, concepts and tools to help leaders be more effective in their organisational roles. I hope this paper would inspire readers to reflect on the roots of their purpose and get engaged towards discovering and living purposefully. I invite the readers to engage with me so that we could be of service to each other and to our respective worlds.

Methodology – Action Research (AR) and why I selected AR.

Since the area of my research project requires my direct involvement, since it requires inquiring into purposefulness of leaders in organisations and my own, which are human and social issues, Action Research (AR) would be an appropriate methodology for this inquiry (Susman & Evered, 1978). The summary of the research methods being used in this inquiry is illustrated in figure 3.



Figure 2: Research methods for this inquiry.

AR is conducted from three possible perspectives; first-person, second-person and third-person and I choose to use first-person AR to inquire in to my own purposefulness and second-person AR to inquire in to the purposefulness of others. The interactions I have with others are inquired with a combination of first-and second-person inquiry methods. While I see some potential for third-person AR, I am not using that perspective at present as I would like my first- and second-person inquiry to inform me of the need for third-person inquiry. First person AR guides us to notice our own responses as it happens even if such responses are subtle, providing us glimpses of our own fickleness. Second person AR guides us to notice the quality of our interactions with others that includes liberating speaking disciplines nested within the liberating listening disciplines. Third person AR notices impact of leadership capacity generated through first person and second person research/practice at an organizational scale. First-, second-, and third- person research/practice mutually generate, require, and reinforce one another because each is the preparation to welcome rather than resist timely transformation, at the personal, relational, and organizational scale, respectively (Torbert, 2006).

My first-person inquiry is conducted through multiple ways of knowing that includes knowing through experiences I perceive from my five senses, knowing when I do creative work such as writing poetry and stories, knowing from what others teach me and knowing when I use the earlier knowledge in my practice of coaching and developing leaders. “Extended Epistemology” articulated by John Heron provides a theoretical framework of four interwoven ways of knowing (Heron 1992, 1999), reach beyond the confines of conventional intellectual positivism to embrace the pre-verbal, manifest and tacit knowing’s we might associate with artists, crafts people and our own guts and hearts and bodies (Seeley, Reason 2008). Heron says:

Experiential knowing — imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing — is the ground of presentational knowing. Presentational knowing — an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms — is the ground of propositional knowing. And propositional knowing — expressed in statements that something is the case — is the ground of

practical knowing — knowing how to exercise a skill (Heron 1999: 122).

I attempt to journal experiences in my life from all four ways of knowing I referred to in the earlier section and reflect upon them. ‘Reflective interpretations’ that includes primary interpretations, secondary interpretations, interpretations of authority and representations, and critical interpretations articulated by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) provides a theoretical framework for such reflective work. I also find the Gibbs (1998:47) model of reflection (figure 1), based on Kolb's work is a useful framework to reflect on experiences by describing what happened, reflecting on what I was thinking and feeling, evaluating what was good and bad about the experience, making sense of the situation, reflecting on alternate action that was possible during the situation and planning new action in case the same situation arose again.



Figure 3: Gibbs model of reflection

While there are many options available to conduct second-person research, I find co-operative inquiry methods relevant for me to inquire with groups of people who would find it useful to co-inquire about purposefulness. Heron and Reason (2006) articulates a theoretical background to co-operative inquiry in their Handbook of Co-operative Inquiry. The four phases recommended by them are useful to give structure to the process. In Phase 1, a group of co-researchers come together to explore an agreed area of human activity. In Phase 2 the co-researchers now also become co-subjects: they engage in the actions they have agreed; and observe and record the process and outcomes of their own and each other's action and experience. Phase 3 is in some ways the touchstone of the inquiry method. It is a stage in which the co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their action and experience. In Phase 4, after an agreed period in Phases 2 and 3, the co-researchers re-assemble to share—in both presentational and propositional forms, their practical and experiential data, and to consider their original ideas in the light of it (Heron & Reason, 2006).

Most of the propositional learning would come from scanning the literature available in this area. I find that there is a large academic territory that covers my inquiry area. The academic territory that covers the three circles of leadership, purposefulness, organisations and leadership effectiveness is shown in figure 4 below.

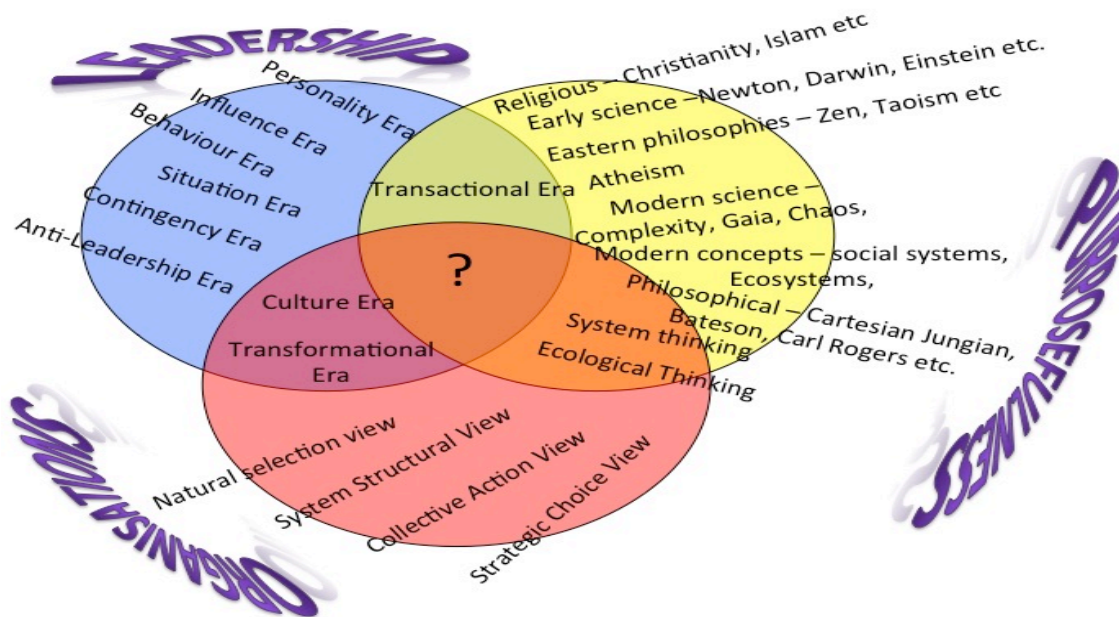


Figure 4: The broad academic territory for my inquiry

Since I am new to these methods of inquiry, I approach my inquiry with a beginner's mind-set so that I can discover the most appropriate methods for my inquiry.

Purposefulness – a first person perspective

While I make sense of purposefulness differently at present, I feel a brief description of my journey up to this point would help set the context to relate to the present. I came across the concept of 'Purposefulness' when I was about thirty-five years of age. The idea has evolved in my mind over the last 18 years and based on various experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing. While the idea is still evolving, 'Purposefulness' to me means making choices, behaving and taking action based on a higher purpose that contributes to the improvement of our environment and its people, doing what we enjoy and doing what we are good at doing.

The following response to an interview question to me by a colleague illustrates the circumstances that made me experience purpose for the first time.

I think the main turning point would be when I attended 'Mastery of Self'¹. Once I started understanding the potential of the human brain, I realised I had the potential to achieve much more than I thought was possible. I realised that I had the potential to change my self by changing my words, physiology, language and I realised, 'yes, I can change the conditions of my life by changing my behaviours'. I realised the negative² behaviours I had was having a negative impact on my performance. Although I was not addicted, drinking alcoholic beverages had an impact on my thinking and physical health. I had stopped exercises and was gaining weight. All these behaviours were having an

¹ Mastery of Self is the title of a four-day workshop I attended, at which I experienced propositional learning of the concept of purpose, that followed with a presentational experiences where I wrote a draft of my first purpose statement using a creative process.

² I use the word 'negative' to describe behaviours that can cause an unfavourable impact on my physical and mental well-being.

adverse impact on my performance. The idea was getting clearer during 'Mastery of Self'³, when we started writing bottom lines³; what do you plan to do for our spiritual development, mental development, relational development, emotional development, physical development etc. These ideas were all in my life even at that point; we⁴ went to church every Sunday and my school was a catholic school where I learnt 'good'⁵ attitudes and behaviours. But I think all these attitudes and behaviours fell in to place and started making more sense because there was someone⁶ who actually helped me believe that these are important things in life, not optional extras. And then when I wrote my purpose statement and read it and re-read it, I saw why the bottom lines were important in living purposefully. But even at this point the purpose was just a target for me, something to achieve.

Going back to the workshop seventeen years ago and recollecting my experience, I can now make sense of the methodology of writing of my purpose; a mix of experiential, presentational and propositional knowing. I experience a different world, being in the workshop filled with inspirational music, stories and poems. Thinking about this experience now, makes me realise it constitutes experiential knowing. The meditation and humour is relaxing and helps me focus. The concepts make sense and the creative methods of making a mental depiction, creating a collage and sharing the draft purpose statement with other participants the next day in my little group, after allowing the creativity to process in my mind overnight, helps me get engaged with my purpose and believe in my potential to live it. Thinking about this experience now, makes me realise it constitutes presentational knowing. Thereafter I make changes to my habits by practicing meditation,

³ The minimum levels of achievement in behaviours that constitutes purposeful living, also referred to as 'life strategy'.

⁴ My parents, siblings and me

⁵ I use the word 'good' to describe behaviours that can cause a favourable impact on my physical and mental well-being.

⁶ The trainer who conducted the workshop.

starting to pray again, exercising, reading books relevant to my purpose, spending more time with my family and reducing/eliminating expenditure that are not value adding. Thinking about this experience now, makes me realise it constitutes practical knowing. I refer to these as purposeful behaviours as they help me align with my purpose statement. I experience better physical health and peace of mind when I behave purposefully and lesser physical health and peace of mind, visible through physical illness, anger, stress and lack of sleep when my behaviour is not purposeful. The purpose statement I wrote 18 years ago has gone through many revisions. The current version of my purpose that was written⁴ about 5 years ago is given below and an attempt to artfully express it is in figure 4 below;

Help make this world a better place through better people!

To guide those I am fortunate enough to encounter to become better individuals, team players and leaders thereby learning to be better at it myself. Grow by helping other to grow and be successful by helping others be successful.

I am driven towards living this purpose as I believe the world needs this consciousness, as I believe I have been gifted with the talent and been called upon by almighty God to make a difference, as I believe I have the potential to inspire others to choose a better way to live and as I believe this chosen path will help me to be financially free to provide for my family and to focus on my chosen vocation.

To succeed in this purpose I will continue to get guidance from God almighty, develop a high level of emotional maturity, build value adding quality relationships, acquire relevant knowledge and skills, take care of my body and mind through the right art of living and take steps to enhance my financial independence (Ranjan's digital file, 8 October 2013).

⁴



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Figure 4: The illustration of the purpose of Ranjan De Silva

Two years after writing this purpose, I take a decision to change my career to become a personal, team and leadership development specialist to get in to an arena that helps me live a life closer to my purpose statement. My work includes helping others to discover their purpose and help them write their purpose statement, using a process similar to the one described above, and thereafter help them to plan their lifestyle to include purposeful behaviour. The following journal entries illustrate a current example of a day I feel I was behaving purposefully.

I woke early after just 5 hours sleep, as I was excited about continuing the writing. I feel this feeling of excitement and anticipation could be generated, as a part of me knows that this work is purposeful. However since I had to

publish the monthly newsletter today, most of the morning was consumed by it, while I am eagerly awaiting its completion to continue my writing. I first write a blog post, that gets included in the newsletter, titled 'power of purpose for successful leadership' so that I remain in my inquiry area during this time. I get interrupted multiple times by work issues that require my attention. I finally finish it. It is almost 4 pm. I take a short nap from 4 pm to 5 p.m. I wake up and exercise. It is 6.30 pm and it is time for the weekly DSG (dissertation support group - a group of four ADOC doctoral students from my batch) Skype call. It is now 10 pm and I am yet to start writing as I took it a bit easy having dinner and watching some TV. Ranjan's Journal Entry, 29 January 2016)

In the above journal entry, the feeling of excitement and energy for me is an indication of being purposeful. If not I feel lethargic and disappointed with myself for wasting valuable time. I also consider steps such as an afternoon nap, taking time to enjoy dinner and watching some TV, described in the above journal entry, as purposeful activity, as it helps recharge me to continue writing, which is more directly connected with my purpose. Therefore I believe I attempt to live purposefully while I guide others to do the same as a part of my practice as a CEO success coach and team leadership specialist.

Purposefulness from second-person perspective

I come from a catholic background and my belief in God is strong. Various mainstream religions and philosophies guide people to live purposefully and therefore some associate purposefulness with religion. Coming from a multi religious country, I find the people attending transformational experiences facilitated by me belonging to a variety of religious and scientific orientations and as such it is important for me to understand purpose from different paradigms.

I attempt to understand purpose from people who come from various faiths and philosophies through a series of conversation with them and the following extracts illustrates these viewpoints;

One of the members of my DSG who comes from a Christian background, says;

So the word purpose for me makes me think back to that almost a God given purpose or God given responsibility to God's purpose. I'm not sure which it is. I'm not sure if I'm given the purpose by my God or if I needed to seek and serve that purpose for him.

Another member of my DSG who comes from a Hindu background, says;

I don't know whether I call it a purpose, but maybe I do have a purpose, I don't know. I think if what I do is meaningful, gives me meaning. Sure I have a purpose as a mother, I have a purpose as a professional, but for me it's more about what is giving me meaning. A part of what is giving me meaning is giving meaning to others. Part of my work is that; how we bring transformation among others. I have not thought of purpose, it is not something that...

Another member of my DSG who is not baptised in to any particular religion, but believes there is a God, says;

So for me, and it really developed over the past three or four years, having a purpose, is about being of myself. I find it most fulfilling, because it liberates myself from all these, you know, making money ... for what? All these material things what we buy and throw away in the environment. I think the most important thing is to have an experience and also to offer my kids experiences that they can make it alone and also to see me as their mother as someone who leaves a legacy for them. Where they can say I'm learning something from my mother, it's not just by what I say, but by the way I am. For me a purposeful life is to have a kind of purpose in terms of goal ... a call ... it's almost a calling. For me the calling ... what are my task and my role here in this world ... to contribute a little piece to the bigger game and knowing what that is and how well I'm doing. It's pretty much all about the contribution of giving ... being.

A work colleague of mine, who comes from a Muslim background, says;

For me broadly, purpose depicts my reason for being, and also my... what would bring me joy when it comes to my transcendence to my next life or moving on to my next life. That's knowing that I had lived life meaningfully directed towards something is what purpose means.

A member of the previous ADOC cohort, who is a client of mine and who comes from a Buddhist background says;

It's something I've been struggling with for a while, because even from an inquiry point of view, this is kind of going back to the core, because a lot of the time I have very, sort of, semi permeable boundaries between what I do at work and what I do at home and who am I as a person. So to me... I just can't kind of conceptualize a (purpose) statement, but I can say that some of the very strong aspects for me are; emancipation, being free is important to me. And then I explained to you what my being free means. This has Buddhist roots. So for me the purpose is deeply related to how I am in the world. It's not broad, but it's broader than saying; 'you know in my purpose I'm going to work towards this type of thing'. It's also very reflective. So if I'm talking about a particular chronological way of being, organizational and human condition, and how well I am living up to that. So to me its kind of a way of who you are and how you be in the world, is the purpose. And that's why for me its difficult to articulate it, it's just not this, it's this that and the other and stuff going on. So for me, as you said, the way I look at it is that what compels me to act, what compels me to take risks, what compels me to get up in the morning and do what I'm doing.

A friend of mine who was a fellow-member of a social service organisation and who also attended the 'Mastery of Self' workshop conducted by me and who is an atheist, says;

Purposeful living for me is, finding ones passion, developing skills required to be excellent at it and strive for success in that area which you are passionate about. People who like to say that... some times it's a thing

like service or whatever, but to me Ranjan service is not the most important thing as a matter of fact, its like the last thing. For me I don't think the greatest tennis players or the cricketers in this world are servicing anybody, by playing tennis or cricket other than by providing great entertainment. But they do what they do and that is their service, they don't start saying; I am going to be of service to others, I don't think so. Purely from a business or an achievers perspective, I think you should just really find out what you want to do in life, and get out there and develop the skills the knowledge to be good at it and then go ahead and jump into the pool and be good at it and succeed and make a name for yourself. That is purposeful life for me... so it could be anything that you are passionate about and good at.

A former colleague of mine who is a professor, the director of a leading management university, who also attended the 'Mastery of Self' workshop and who comes from a Christian background says;

For me purpose is something deeper than a mission where your purpose is why you are living, in other words the reason for your actions, reason for your commitment, reason why you get motivated to do something which gives you drive, a compelling reason for you to do whatever you are doing. It gives you guidance like a compass / indicator where it gives you a certain energy to do something. So I always use three "P's", purpose, passion & performance. So purpose is the starting point and then you had the passion in order to go for your purpose and fulfil your purpose and that is manifested by performance. To start with, you need to have that clarity in your mind, this is why I am doing this, this is what I want in life & why I want it. So the what part should be more technically put together, it in vision or the aspiration, why part is the purpose, the deep held desire within you and the conviction that what your doing is right.

A client of mine who has attended the 'Mastery of Self' workshop twice and who comes from a Roman Catholic background says;

Purpose for me is, something that you live for and something that you want to achieve. I don't think a purpose is something that you have to end; it happens right throughout your life ... you realize what it is and enjoy living it. According to me that's 'purpose'. It is not a destination it is a journey. I feel that 'purpose', is with you all the time, you live it.

The sense I make from the above responses is that the meaning of purpose is different from person to person and it is influenced by each person's culture that has an impact on their upbringing and as a result their attitudes and beliefs. A common thread that emerges is that the individual needs and preferences of a person, their talent, the needs of their environment influence each of their purposes. Most of those interviewed feel that purpose is about being and giving rather than becoming and getting therefore it is something that evolves as we experience life. They feel that purposeful living would help them experience emotions such as liberating, energising, enjoyable and fulfilling. These can be categorised as states of being that people would seek rather than avoid.

An early proponent of the concept of purpose was Aristotle's thinking of purpose tend to summarise the viewpoints of this diverse group of people. He suggests that the most basic meaning of quality of life refers to the ability of humans to formulate and implement purpose. Adoption of a good lifestyle that includes good health, social wellbeing and environmental safety etc. or their promotion is purposeful activity (Jonsen, 1976). While concepts of health, social well being and environment is eluded by Aristotle, he does not talk about skills, knowledge and vocation that is echoed in some of the conversations and my first-person knowing.

These conversations also highlight various characteristics related to purpose. I list them here only as a listing of what is heard during the conversations and not by any means to claim that a purposeful person needs to have these characteristics. These characteristics are; loyalty to a higher power, conscientious, dutiful, mutuality, environmental consciousness, exemplary behaviour, being of service to the planet, seeking emancipation,

reflective, being yourself, motivated to act, willing to take risks, drive to develop self, service to others, clarity of mind, commitment, a deep desire to achieve. A concept that helps make sense of the relationship between personal characteristics and purposefulness is the 'Fourth Superfactor' that has been developed to explain the space of individual differences in personality. The earlier three factors were extroversion, neuroticism and psychoticism (Eysenck, 1978). 'Purposefulness' was a label given to describe a collection of characteristics; conscientiousness, competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline (persistence) and deliberateness during the inquiry that led to the discovery of this fourth super factor (Cartwright & Peckar, 1993). It is interesting to note that some of these characteristics are included in the list created from the conversations. However I find it difficult to accept this as a comprehensive list as the characteristic can differ from person to person. This list is more relevant to someone who looks at purpose as getting and becoming, an achievement orientation. A person with an orientation of giving and being would have characteristics such as emancipation, mutuality, service to others etc.

Many of the conversation brings out a theme about how we are connected to the larger world we live in that includes the environment, other people and other groups of people. A theoretical frame can be provided for this with the work done by Fritjof Capra as written in his book, 'The Web of Life', which unifies many fields and theories to explain living systems and how we have evolved to who we are today. He uses a variety of theories in developing the theory of 'Living Systems'. 'Systems Thinking' that evolved with the work of organismic biologist, gestalt psychologist, ecologist, physicist and philosophers over a period of time, Process Thinking, Tektalogy and General Systems Theory developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy forms the base for his work. He extensively uses Cybernetics developed by Norbert Wiener who had a strong influence on Gregory Bateson who roamed freely across disciplines. Information Theory developed by Norbert Wiener and Claude Shannon, Cybernetics of the brain developed by Ross Ashby and Computer models of cognition developed by Herbert Simon and Allen Newell (Capra, 1997, pp 36 – 71). Using these and many other theories, he developed the concept of 'Living Systems' that includes three criteria; patterns of organisation, structures and life processes understood through the concepts of 'autopoiesis' (self making) developed by Humberto

Maturana and Francisco Varela, 'dissipative structures' as defined by Prigogine as the structure of living systems and 'cognition' defined initially by Gregory Bateson and more fully by Maturana and Varela as the process of life (Capra, 1997, pp 155 – 157).

These studies show that life is a cognitive process and we respond to 'our world' and innovatively adapt and create ourselves. This shows therefore each living being is a part of a larger system and the choices we make are beneficial or detrimental to our world. Conversely, the changes that happen in our world have a beneficial or detrimental impact on living beings. Some of the conversation above also brings out the theme that being purposeful is about knowing where we belong in this world and behaving in a beneficial manner to our environment. Therefore the questions that come to my mind is; does understanding my role in this eco system become synonymous with discovering my purpose? Is making appropriate choices and adopting an appropriate life style beneficial to the eco system (that includes me as a part of the eco system) and is it synonymous with 'purposeful living'?

The sense I make from these concepts coming from a wide religious and scientific spectrum is that the evolution of the knowledge about life and the purpose of life are as complex as the evolution of life it self. As my understanding of life evolves during this doctoral process, I start to see my world differently and begin to feel the need for the refinement of my currently perceived purpose. Therefore I believe that the understanding of our individual purposes requires the understanding our world; the world we cognitively create and experience, which is different to the larger planet we live in. The value each of us can add to the evolution of the planet could be correlated to our cognition of a world we create around us and as such a deeper study in to these phenomena can help make more sense of the 'purpose of living'.

Leadership Effectiveness in Organisations

Based on my first-person reflections and second-person interactions, 'Leadership Effectiveness' to me means making choices, behaving and taking action that influences other to choose, behave and act in a manner that help take their organisations closer to its

mission and objectives. In attempting to provide a theoretical frame to make sense of the meaning I make regarding leadership it would be useful to examine and select appropriate theories that has evolved from the begging of this century, from the personality era to the servant leadership and authentic leadership era where major transformations were seen in leadership characteristics in this journey (Van Seters, Field, 1990).

Out of the various era's of leadership, I can resonate more with Servant leadership and Authentic leadership. Servant leadership is built on a high-quality dyadic relationship, trust, and fairness are expected to be the most important mediating processes to encourage self-actualisation, positive job attitudes, performance, and a stronger organisational focus on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (Van Dierendonck 2011). In *Authentic Leadership*, the leaders are not passive observers of their lives but rather individuals who can develop self-awareness from their experiences. Authentic leaders act on that awareness by practicing their values and principles, sometimes at substantial risk to themselves. They are careful to balance their motivations so that they are driven by these inner values as much as by a desire for external rewards or recognition. Authentic leaders also keep a strong support team around them, ensuring that they live integrated, grounded lives (George, Sims et al., 2007). Since purposefulness as explored in this paper earlier is related to behaving, guided by a set of values, in a manner beneficial to our world, which includes organisations we belong to, and as servant leadership and authentic leadership is build on similar principles there is a good possibility of a close relationship between purposefulness and leadership effectiveness in organisations.

Based on my first-person reflections and second-person interactions, 'Organisation' to me means an entity consisting of a group of people who have come together formally or informally to pursue common goals defined by one or many persons involved in forming the entity. While there could be many types of organisations such as political, government, public, non-governmental judicial, military, social, sports, environmental, rebel, world – governing bodies such as the united nations, and commercial etc., the focus of my inquiry would be on commercial organisations as my experience, familiarity and training is related to commercial organisations. The effectiveness of an organisation would depend on the effectiveness of its leadership. Looking at this phenomena through available theory, while early organisational theory looked at from four frames based on its applicability to micro

and macro levels in organisations; natural selection view, collective action view, system structural view and strategic choice view as presented by W. Graham Astley and Andrew H. Van de Ven in their paper 'Central Perspectives and debates in Organisation theory' (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983), it does not focus on the leadership qualities required to lead organisations faced with current opportunities and threats.

Therefore a newer contribution in to this body of knowledge needs to be examined. Research on change in organisations presented by Henry Mintzberg, and Frances Westley, in their paper 'Cycles of Organisational Change (Mintzberg, Westley 1992) and the work by A. M Berg on 'Action Research and Organisation Theory', cover fields or topics not usually addressed in industrial action research such as gender, ethics, organisational rationalities, the question of self-reference, the discourses of management and leadership and the public-private dimension help bridge this deficiency. A concept that does not seem to emerge in these theories is the purposefulness of leaders and the benefits and challenges that come with it. Linking action research and mainstream thinking about organisations, where the contributors challenge and transcend the disparate positions and insufficiencies within both research has led to a more self-reflective, self-critical, and task-oriented research approaches with a clear space for deliberation in the area of purposefulness of leaders and its impact on organisations. The words of Kurt Lewin; 'There is nothing as practical as a good theory, but good theory is also developed from practice' (Berg, 2008), underlines the usefulness of an action research approach to inquire in to purposefulness in organisations.

Mindfulness and how I stumbled up on it.

A conversation with my colleague referred to earlier, where we share our respective actions that followed the previous interview and transcript reading, lead to a discussion that helps us see the beginnings of how purposefulness and mindfulness are closely linked and the importance of having both these aspects working together for leadership effectiveness in organisations.

As we discuss about situations in her life that could have had an influence on her purpose,

she narrates the stories of three people who had an influence in her life as reproduced below;

As a kid I had a lot of freedom, I didn't have typical conservative parents so I spent a lot of time with people. And there were two people who I think they were beyond my family; there was no relationship to them. One was an old couple, old Burgher (Euro – Asian) couple and the other was an artist. And both of them, in the way they lived, I saw how value driven they were and how they radiated contentment as it happens. And that influenced me a lot, I used to spend many evenings either watching my friend paint and the patience, the commitment to the ability or the commitment to see something through the simplicity of life, all of that had a huge impact. And the old couple! The way they treated each other, the things they valued most, the way they loved each other and also the way they showed love to me when I was there. I learnt so much from them that a blend of those two became also me. That's a huge influence, and when I grew up and I entered society and I saw... and by the time I entered society as an adult, as a professional realising ... how much chaos, hurt, anger loneliness, disengagement, struggle people went through. I just wanted to find ways of helping them and shaping my life to help people be able to live a value based life, a meaningful life and give them that level of peace that they...

Going through the transcript of the interview, which was sent to her for her confirmation and additional thoughts, leads to a series of interesting developments that helped us to continue to inquire together. After having read that section in the transcript about the artist that had an influence in her life, she is driven from within to call the artist and express her gratitude. He is surprised at her call and their conversation makes them realise that they had something in common; mindfulness. While she is inquiring into mindfulness, he practices and teaches mindfulness. She also discovers that he works with groups on cooperate executives facilitating mindfulness groups and she is invited to be a part of a group so that she inquires in to mindfulness while practicing mindfulness. She accepts the

invitation and intends to learn mindfulness and inquire with her group. While this series of events can be nothing more than a coincidence, she says she may not have even called him nor had a deep conversation if not for something that got triggered in her as she read the transcript. Why did the transcript trigger her to act? Did the transcript touch some thing within her such as her purpose, which triggers her to act? Or is it the values, which may have a part in shaping the purpose, which triggered her to act? Does this point to the possibility that our purpose or values motivate us to act? My inquiry attempts to go deeper down this path to make sense of how purpose can influence leaders to act and how leaders can use purpose to motivate their teams to act for organisational effectiveness. After taking this action she goes on to reflect on her action and share it with me. Her sharing makes me continue to inquire, leading me in to the concept of ‘mindfulness’, unexpectedly. The process of action and inquiry continues. This is an important aspect in action research as per the words of Bill Torbert; Action inquiry is a research practice inspired by the primitive sense that all our actions, including those we are most certain about and are most committed to, are in fact also inquiries (Torbert, 2006).

The following dialogue transpires during a follow conversation regarding her call to the artist and what it evoked.

Me – And you said that made you call that artist. So could you tell me about the thought process, what made you give that call?

My colleague – I guess the bigger part was that he has been a huge influence in who I’ve become; the simplicity, the humility and all that, he has influenced a lot of it. But in the years since I left Kandy (The second largest city in Sri Lanka), other things have overtaken my life and not had or not taken the initiative to even visit or call and touch base. Then reading through the entire transcript made me realise how much effect this simple human being had had on my life. I felt a great sense of gratitude towards his contributions towards my life. So I think I should take the time to let him know that he had influenced my life. So that was my purpose to call him back and let him know that he did influence, the person I was today.

***Me** – So what did you say when you called and how did he react?*

***My colleague** – Well initially it was more or less small talk trying to catch up in the years gone by. So then I did mention my reason for calling and I could feel the emotion in his voice. He said he didn't realise that he had such an impact. I could feel his emotions. I could feel a reconnect in that conversation. So that was ... I think he said he ... he was very humbled by knowing that I grew into who I was and I yet remembered to call and thank him for his little contribution.*

While the interview was much lengthy and I chose not to re-produce it in its entirety, this section shows how her action aroused emotions and helps re-kindle a relationship that had been meaningful for her. The conversation then leads to the concept of 'mindfulness' as in the section of the transcript re-produced below;

***Me** – That's amazing. So how you had mentioned that he had opened up some doors for you with regard to your mindfulness inquiry. Can we talk about that?*

***My colleague** – Yeah. Where he is into meditation and some of his friends are also into mindfulness meditation, which is now kind of practiced, from a every personal perspective in the retreat in Nilambe (a village close to Kandy). Now there are two retreats, one is the regular Buddhist meditation Centre and there is one that actually teaches mindfulness. And so when I started talking about what triggered me to call him and thank him, I also mentioned that I was taking a similar path in my doctoral studies and then he was so touched by the fact that I focused on mindfulness and how it was going to affect the working human being. There was more than willing to start digging up contacts for me to start my initial inquiry, how it practiced, and what it entails; is it more behavioural and mental. So he has kind of opened up many paths, where I found people I can talk to and get a much*

more in-depth understanding of the whole concept of mindfulness, mindfulness meditation, how it influences the mind and how it brings down stress level, the whole gamut of things. So kind of what this opened up is really a new path for me to go in search of knowledge as well. And these are practicing people, they are very intuit and they practice it like that.

My colleague went on to say that she would spend time with the group practicing mindfulness, engaging in first person inquiry of her experience and second person inquiry with the group introduced by the artist and then take it in to teams in organisations to dig deeper in to her research question. We discussed possible methods and the manner in which we can continue to inquire together.

Lets now examine the theoretical base for ‘mindfulness’ to try make some sense of the discussion on mindfulness. Lord Buddha presented one of the most profound definitions of ‘mindfulness’ approximately 2500 years ago; “The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the future, but to live the present moments wisely and earnestly”. The British scholar T. H Rhys Davids coined the term “Mindfulness” in his effort to translate the Pali word “sati” (Thanissaro, 1987, as cited in Dhimam, 2009). In the current field of understanding Mindfulness is based on two bodies of knowledge, the first being Buddhist philosophy and the second cognitive Psychology. And much of the Mindfulness interventions are a combination of both. Kabat-Zinn, Wheeler et al. (1998) and Teasdale, Chaskalson (2011) defined mindfulness as a means of paying attention with purpose, to the present moment in a manner that is non- judgmental to whatever arises in the present moment and in the field of your current experience. This theoretical framework therefore hints of a relationship between purposefulness and mindfulness that emerged during my inquiry so far.

The relationship between Purposefulness and Mindfulness

The following section of the conversation with my colleague attempts to illustrate and starts to make sense the relationship between mindfulness and purposefulness.

Me – as you reflect and write... and that alone will give you so much insights and data into the research... did you start seeing any connection between mindfulness and purposefulness?

My colleague – to a greater extent yes somebody can be purposeful and still not achieve it by the fact that their mind is constantly cluttered or the fact that they either live in the past or they are worried too much about the future. And mindfulness is all about living in the here and now. Doing what it takes this moment ... you know... in order to get along with your journey and I think being purposeful is all about having a longer term purpose, but you got to do what it takes right here, right now, so that you move closer. Such a huge connection between the two!

Me – so as we guide people to find a purpose and live it, may be there is a need to also guide people to be more mindful ... otherwise the effort taken in helping people find a purpose or discover a purpose which may already be within them, may almost be wasted if they go through this entire process and write it, but then they are not mindful enough to live it.

My colleague- yes and that's so true and also because purpose is such a ... it's a lifelong activity and unless you are mindful, you could also just start day dreaming about achieving your purpose or worrying about never achieving your purpose that you really don't do anything about it ultimately. So you spend your entire life either worrying or day dreaming, thinking it's just going to happen. So it is key that people do become mindful of what their actions are ... which also comes back to reflecting on their every moment. What am I doing in this moment to get me closer to my purpose?

Me – One that ... I had an insight as I was doing the session today, and guiding the team here to find their purpose, I think the real value of the purpose work we do is not the purpose statement itself. I kind of had a

hunch that the real value would be in the next step where we get them to think about their three-year plan or five-year plan. Now in that plan, when you go into the components like spiritual, mental, emotional, physical aspects ... if we take the, say spiritual component, there we talk about doing meditation or prayer for example. And thinking back about my situation, I realise although I started actually meditating after I came for MS, after finding and writing the purpose and the five-year bottom lines. One of the bottom lines was to meditate for so many minutes a day to build my spiritual energy, to get to the purpose. Part of the session was teaching participants to meditate. So it's not that you only write that I will meditate daily, realise what meditation is, realising it is good for us. Because I think everyone has heard of meditation somewhere, but some of them don't know how to do it. And then when you learn how to do it and you go through the alpha experience (A meditation method), and then actually start meditating. You are now spending ten or twenty minutes a day being mindful as meditation is a mindfulness practice. I think similarly from the mental aspect, when we plan 'reading' as a bottom line action and when we start reading for a certain amount of time every day we practice mindfulness. I similarly feel that when you take the relationships aspect, spending time with family without rushing back to work, and just being with your kids and watching them play or teaching them homework gets you focused on being mindful. And then finally even if you take the physical aspect, when we exercise, that 30 minutes walking or jogging session everyday, and when we focus on our breathing and our heartbeat, we are being mindful. So I kind of feel the real benefit of purpose comes when the bottom lines are implemented mindfully. Leaders are self driven to attempt to behave purposefully and inspire their people enough to attempt to live purposefully. And I think those who actually behave as per the planned bottom-lines, starts getting the benefit of being purposeful. And I feel they may think that it is the purpose that makes the difference, but I feel it could be actually their mindfulness which makes the difference and that is connected to a purpose. What do you feel?

***My colleague** – yeah I also think that we take it even a step further when we talk about the 11-point day, that's pure mindfulness (11 point day is a point system that helps to evaluate the day quantitatively). It's about telling yourself; the way I lived today got me closer to my purpose? So I think it is great that we now have this ... it's almost the flow of, where you identify the purpose and then you break it down to goals and then you actually have a way of evaluating your day ... so once these activities are done consciously and consistently you know ...*

***Me** – so it starts with reflecting on the purpose in the morning and visualising what you have to do during the day.*

***My colleague** – so it actually is ... you know ... in a sense, that brings mindfulness altogether. Because you are living for that day, that moment, in to what it takes to get you focusing ... and you can at the end of the day actually look back and say; you know here is what I have done today. Here's what I've scored. So you are training the mind to be mindful through the actions we take. And you are giving it a structure, because the mind likes structure. So actually giving it a structure to say; okay if you want to practice mindfulness, here is the structure that you can use.*

***Me** – even for me, and you know that I have been in this judging kind of category in the Myers Briggs Index ... I like structure, I like order and interestingly, I think that was not there when I was in school or even after leaving school. I was very messy in everything. Things were not neat, I couldn't find things, and I think it's more like... I realised that there is a value in having that structure as it will make it easier to find things and its more efficient. And again I think some of our (propositional and later practical) learning's with methods such as 5S (A method introduced by the Japanese to improve neatness, cleanliness, order and efficiency) and Kaizen (Japanese words for 'good change' and a method developed by them)*

based the continuous improvements work, shows the importance of structure and improving processing and all. And I found, for example, I had (propositionally) learned that meditation was good, but I didn't know how to do that. So I was looking for a formula... you used the word structure for it. And that helps in realising that ; 'fine this is what I want to do, this is the formula, okay now let me try it'. And I suppose that's what you mean when you say what 'mindfulness' needs that kind of a structure or formula or process or something to follow. But you can't rush it.

My colleague – *no you can't rush it*

The sense that I make from this conversation is that there is a close relationship between purposefulness and mindfulness. I also feel it is not only that mindfulness is a purposeful activity but also being mindful and reflecting on our actions, helps us continue to discover our purpose, refine our purpose, find new strategies to be purposeful. There could be also people who have a written or non-written purpose but not mindful in their actions. It will be interesting to inquire in to this aspect as my inquiry progresses.

How have I been as I move on this journey of discovery?

The interaction so far has led me to test new ways of helping leaders become more purposeful during my leadership development assignments. These experiments have helped me reflect and continue to test newer ways of guiding leaders. Before these experiences I would narrate stories as metaphors to help participants realise the importance of having a purpose and being purposeful. Thereafter I guide them to reflect on some questions and then show them the format of a purpose statement and invite them to do a first draft. Then they reflect on and improve the purpose statement over night and further sharpen it by based on feedback they receive in a sharing session in small groups. While some of the stories are yet being used, I facilitate a conversation among participants to help them make sense of the importance of purpose from their paradigm. Before these experiences the purpose was more tilted towards 'getting and becoming'. Now participants learn through activities and discussions the benefits of a purpose that is

‘giving and being’. Before these experiences the purpose was about holistic thinking that considered a life that balances being, brain, body, people, money and time. Now participants are encouraged to think about ecological aspects and consider a purpose that helps them to be an integral part of the ecological system of the planet. This change is influenced by reading books such as ‘Ecology of the mind’ (Bateson, 1972) and ‘Web of life’ (Capra, 1996), second-person inquiry through conversations, my own reflections and the response to various new approaches from participants.

I also find myself more mindful regarding my attitudes and behaviours and its impact on my environment, people connected to me and on myself. I live my life inquiring about what I do in these areas throughout the day and continuously take action to improve what I do. For example my exercises are more intense and I find the time to squeeze in my daily exercise routine. I feel concerned when I miss exercises and make up my mind to catch up the next day. I also find that I tend to photograph scenery of nature when I travel for training rather than taking pictures of the participants and their actions. Is this a sign of my newfound awareness and closeness to the ecology of the planet? The photographs have helped me to reflect on various aspects regarding purpose and this is further illustrated in this paper.

Purposefulness and Mindfulness for Leadership Effectiveness

The picture painted in this paper supported by reflections, conversation, relevant theory, questions, themes and methodology show the beginnings of the connections, interfaces, and mutual influence of purposefulness, mindfulness and leadership effectiveness. Purposefulness helps us be more mindful and mindfulness helps us be more purposeful. This process continuously improves leadership qualities such as authenticity, mutuality, dependability, ability to influence, trust etc. The list of qualities may change from person to person due to a variety of reasons such their upbringing, culture, faith, philosophy, needs of their environment, needs of their family and their own needs. Deeper inquiry is required with regard to the various dynamics related to these personal qualities. We also saw that leadership effectiveness is related to these personal qualities and therefore while we could see the beginnings of a relationship between purposefulness and mindfulness

helping leaders be more effective in organisations, more research work is required to come up with theory, concepts and strategies that could help leaders develop themselves through being purposeful and mindful.

Where does the inquiry go from here?

The various first-person and second person research work needs to continue to allow new paths to open up and new branches to grow. Working on this paper has helped open up the path of 'values', which I feel is a significant component in finding answers to my research question. Continuing to live my life as an inquiry, continuing to meet in the existing co-operative inquiry groups, forming new co-operative inquiry groups, having conversations and taking part in presentational activity is likely to bring out other important aspects or themes that could be significant to the inquiry question. In addition to the new questions generated while writing this paper, new questions that are likely to crop up as the inquiry progresses would be reflected on to generate answers and new questions.

This is work in progress and I believe it will be work in progress for a lifetime and beyond.

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